

What is claimed is:

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1. A system for distributing digital media assets to a plurality of users, comprising:
 - a portal comprising at least one server computer, the server computer executing a media library database server application that manages access to a master library of media assets that can be accessed by users via one or more communication networks; and
 - a plurality of media player devices that communicate with the portal to access media assets for use, at least some of the plurality of media player device comprising a processor that executes a database client application that manages media assets licensed for use by a user.
 2. The system of claim 1, wherein the media library database server application of the portal manages usage rights of users to media assets.
 3. The system of claim 2, wherein the media library database server application of the portal synchronizes with the database client application in the media player device so that the database client application stores information identifying those media assets that a user has licensed usage rights.
 4. The system of claim 1, wherein a single user may have multiple media player devices from which the user desires to experience media assets, wherein the media library database server application of the portal synchronizes with the database client application in each media player device of a user to provide a user with access to media assets from any of the user's media player devices.
 5. The system of claim 1, wherein the plurality of media player devices comprise one or more devices selected from the group including home electronic devices, vehicle-mounted electronic devices and portable electronic devices.
 6. The system of claim 1, wherein each media player device further comprises a media player software engine for allowing a user to control playback and usage of media assets.

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7. The system of claim 6, wherein the media player software engine is portal to a variety of hardware platforms of media player devices.

8. The system of claim 1, wherein the portal manages streaming of media assets to the media player device, wherein the media assets are local to the portal or remotely stored by sources to which the portal connects.

9. The system of claim 1, wherein the portal manages downloading of media asset to the media player device for storage and use, wherein the media assets are local to the portal or remotely stored by sources to which the portal connects.

10. The system of claim 1, wherein the portal generates and provides to a user a code that is required to be entered into all of the user's media player devices before enabled for operation when a user reports to the portal that a user's media player device is lost or stolen, and the portal electronically transmits a control message to each of the user's media player devices to require the user to follow such a code entry procedure.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein when a valid code is not entered into a user's media player device, the media player device is disabled.

12. The system of claim 1, wherein the portal maintains an on-line database of media assets for users of media player devices lacking a database client application.

13. A method for distributing digital media assets to a plurality of users comprising steps of:

in a portal:

storing a plurality of media assets or identifiers associated with media assets stored remotely from the portal;

maintaining a master database of media assets that can be used by one or more of a plurality of users each having at least one media player device;

identifying and tracking in the master database those media assets for which each user has usage rights on a media player device associated with a user;

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electronically transmitting media assets to a user's media player device;
in a media player device:

electronically receiving media assets from the portal to enable a user to use the media assets;

maintaining a database of media assets for which a user has usage rights;

wherein each media player device and the portal electronically communicate with each other to synchronize the database in a media player device with the master database.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein a single user may have multiple media player devices from which the user desires to experience media assets, and wherein the master database synchronizes with the database in each media player device of a user to provide a user with access to media assets from any of the user's media player devices.

15. The method of claim 13, wherein the step of electronically transmitting comprises streaming the media asset to the media player device.

16. The method of claim 13, wherein the step of electronically transmitting comprises downloading the media asset to the media player device for storage and use.

17. The method of claim 13, wherein in the portal, further comprising the step of generating and providing to a user a code that is required to be entered into all of the user's media player devices before enabled for operation when a user reports to the portal that a user's media player device is lost or stolen, and electronically transmits a control message to each of the user's media player devices to require the user to follow such a code entry procedure.

18. The method of claim 17, and further comprising the step of disabling a user's media player device when a valid code is not entered.

19. A method for distributing media assets to users, comprising steps of:
in a computing center, storing a plurality of media assets or identifiers associated with media assets stored remotely from the computing center;

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maintaining a master database of media assets that can be used by one or more of a plurality of users each having one or more media player devices;

in connection with the sale of a physical media asset to a user, receiving a request to provide access to a corresponding digital media asset for use by the user on a media player device; and

storing in the master database information indicating that a user has usage rights of the digital media asset so that the user can electronically access it from the computing center.

20. The method of claim 19, and further comprising receiving payment from the user for use of the digital media asset.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein the step of receiving payment comprises electronically receiving payment by an Internet-based media asset retailer.

22. The method of claim 19, and further comprising the step of, in the computing center, apportioning an amount of the payment between the operator of the computing center, retailers of the physical media asset and the media asset owner.

23. A media player device for use in a system comprising a portal that maintains a master database library of media assets that can be accessed via one or more communication networks, the media player device comprising: a processor that executes a database client application that manages media assets licensed for use by a user and a media playback application that manages the user of a media asset by a user.

24. The media player device of claim 23, wherein the database client application communicates with the central portal to synchronize usage rights of media assets with the master database library.

25. A portal for use in a system for distributing digital media assets to a plurality of users, comprising: at least one server computer, the server computer executing a media library database server application that manages access to a master library of media assets that can be accessed by users of media player devices via one or more communication networks.

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26. The portal of claim 25, wherein media library database server application synchronizes with database client application in media player devices.

27. The portal of claim 26, wherein the media library database server application synchronizes with the database client application in each media player device of a user to provide a user with access to media assets from any of the user's media player devices.

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